

## **Perceiving Bias in the News: The Hostile Media Phenomenon Revisited**

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Note: Not for citation without the authors' permission. Prepared for presentation at the 2000 meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago, Illinois, April 27-30. The authors would like to thank Steven Voss and Ellen Riggle for a variety of helpful comments throughout the project.

## **Introduction**

By virtually all accounts, the mass media play a crucial role in American politics. For most citizens, the media -- particularly television and the press -- provides the only portal through which to view political "reality." Increasingly, however, the public has become disenchanted with its news source. A variety of studies document plummeting ratings of the media as a "fair," "trustworthy," and impartial source of political information. To many journalists, the growing tendency of the public to discount the news as biased and inaccurate is one of the more unsettling criticisms of their profession. After all, good journalism in the U.S. is often equated with accurate, balanced and unbiased coverage of important issues (Entman 1989). Yet, a variety of groups -- from Accuracy in the Media (a conservative media watchdog group) to Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (a liberal group) -- routinely accuse the media of biased coverage on a range of political issues. And while many Americans do not perceive bias in the media (Schneider and Lewis 1985; Beck 1991; Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt 1998), a growing number do.<sup>1</sup> In the midst of the Lewinsky scandal (October 1998), for example, only a little more than a third of the public felt the media could be trusted to report the news fairly "most of the time" or "just about always."<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, distrust of the media has important political consequences. Survey evidence suggests that journalists and the news industry are increasingly seen by the American public to be part of the "establishment" motivated by their own economic interests rather than the public interest. As James Fallows (1996) argues, although some degree of skepticism is certainly

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the percentage of Americans who think the "stories and reports of news organizations" are "often" or "almost always inaccurate" increased from 34% in 1985 to 56% in 1997 and 58% in 1999 and the percentage of the public who feel that "news organizations generally" are "politically biased in their reporting" rose from 45% (1985) to 47% (1987) and 56% (1999) (The Pew Center for People and the Press, <http://www.people-press.org/feb99mor.htm>).

<sup>2</sup> Source: the 1998 National Election Survey.

healthy in a democracy, a deep-seated distrust of the media and a tendency to discount all news as somehow tainted is likely to reinforce a growing disaffection from politics.

Distrust of the source of the news also seriously undercuts the potential for the news to inform and shape public opinion. In a recent experimental study, Miller and Krosnick (2000) found that two of the more important media effects identified in recent years -- "priming" and agenda setting -- were greatly diminished among people who distrust the media. While "priming" and agenda setting have been assumed to result from mere exposure to the news, Miller and Krosnick (312) concluded that priming is more aptly viewed as a form of "persuasion, whereby some citizens choose to use the information they glean from media coverage *as long as they trust its source*" (emphasis added).

If distrust of the media -- and specifically, perceptions of media bias -- have important political consequences, the question arises: How does the public arrive at such negative judgments of the media in the first place? Our study examines this question with data from a recently completed opinion survey (N = 604) of attitudes toward the media. We examine the process by which people evaluate the bias of a specific news article. To do this, we rely on the results of a survey experiment where respondents read different versions of a news article in which we systematically varied the degree of balance or bias in the news story. Our aim here is to shed new light on an important question: What types of news coverage prompt what types of receivers to view a news story as biased?

### **Prior Research**

How are people likely to form judgments of media bias? Oversimplifying somewhat, explanations have focused on a variety of potential suspects, including the nature of news coverage (e.g., its tone and the degree of actual bias), and characteristics of individual receivers

of the news (e.g., their political predispositions, knowledge, and so on). Among political scientists, these questions have received the most sustained attention in studies of news coverage of elections, where a lively debate exists on whether the media, the candidates, or voters (or all three) are responsible for the increasingly negative "horse-race" coverage of presidential primaries (e.g., Patterson 1994; Zaller 1999).

A recent study by Dalton, Beck and Huckfeldt (1998) provides one of the more comprehensive efforts to study this question in a single presidential election. The authors found a surprising lack of correspondence between respondents' *perceptions* of which candidate their daily newspapers favored during the 1992 presidential campaign and the *actual content* of the papers' coverage of candidates. More important in predicting people's perceptions of news slant were their personal characteristics -- specifically, partisanship. "People with strong attachments to the Republican Party were more likely to see their paper as leaning toward Clinton, independent of the paper's actual coverage. Similarly, people with strong Democratic identifications were more likely to see their newspaper as leaning toward Bush" (p. 120). This tendency for partisans to see bias in news coverage as opposing their preferred candidate, the authors argued, is consistent with the more general "hostile media phenomenon" documented in laboratory studies (see also Beck 1991). Dalton, et al (p. 121) also suggested that their evidence in support of the hostile media hypothesis has important implications for "why the press receive such widespread criticism. Whether on the Left or the Right, partisans see the balanced and objective press as leaning toward their opponent."

The "hostile media phenomenon" was first identified by Vallone, Ross and Lepper (1985, 579) who had pro-Arab and pro-Israeli students observe an identical news broadcast in which the responsibility of Israeli troops for the 1982 massacre of civilians in Lebanese refugee camps was

hotly debated. Vallone and his colleagues found that both groups of partisans thought the taped broadcast was biased in favor of the opposing side. This hostile media phenomenon was replicated and refined in similar studies by Perloff (1989) and Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994).<sup>3</sup>

Before political scientists embrace the hostile media phenomenon as an important foundation for negative evaluations of the press, however, the original laboratory evidence for this hypothesis deserves a closer look. As the authors of the experimental studies acknowledge, the news reports, the topics covered and the participants in the experiments were selected, in part, to ensure that passions would be activated by engaged partisans. In the studies by Vallone et al and Perloff, for example, members of pro-Arab and pro-Israeli student associations were specifically recruited to augment the basic sample of students from introductory psychology classes.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the news broadcasts viewed by the participants were lengthy (e.g., 11 to 36 minutes long) compilations of major network news stories designed to stoke the emotions of partisans on both sides of a controversial issue. Despite the measures taken, a robust hostile media effect failed to materialize in several instances (e.g., Vallone et al's 1980 presidential election study and Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken's experiment involving the abortion issue), prompting the researchers to speculate that the participants in the experiments may not have been *sufficiently* partisan or the stimulus materials may not have been *sufficiently* evocative to bring about the expected effect.

Such inconsistencies raise several questions about the generalizability of the hostile media phenomenon. How applicable is the phenomenon to the general population versus

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<sup>3</sup> The major explanation for the hostile media hypothesis offered by Vallone et al (and supported in subsequent research) is a *different standards explanation*, whereby partisans "correctly perceive that a perfectly balanced newscast had an equal number of facts and images in support of each side, but partisans believe that their side's claims are more accurate than the other side's" (Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken 1994).

engaged activists, partisans and college students? And even more important, what types of *everyday* news stories are capable of triggering hostile media reactions? Is it true, as Vallone et al and Dalton et al suggest, that balanced news stories are capable of promoting a hostile media effect among partisans, or is the phenomenon restricted to the kind of lengthy and engrossing coverage of an issue that is a rarity in the world of 9-second sound-bites and *USA Today* news nuggets? And finally, what characteristics of ordinary receivers interact with the news content to promote or inhibit judgments of media bias?

### **Design and Measures**

To investigate this question, we embedded a news story experiment into a nonprobability survey of 604 non-student adults interviewed by trained college students in the fall of 1999.<sup>5</sup> After responding to a variety of questions on political and social issues, respondents were randomly assigned to read one of four different versions of a fictitious newspaper article about a peace-summit attended by pro-life and pro-choice groups (see the Appendix). They were then asked several questions about the article as well as various background questions.

For the experimental treatment, we systematically varied the nature and degree of bias in the four articles. In two of the stories the portrayal of the (pro-life and pro-choice) groups was *balanced*; in the other two versions of the story, the portrayal was *biased*, with one of the groups depicted more negatively than the other. Thus, in the *Positive Balance* condition, the news story emphasized the efforts of both pro-choice and pro-life groups to achieve reconciliation. The *Negative Balance* condition emphasized the disruptive attempts by both groups to undermine the

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<sup>4</sup> In the third study by Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994), partisan and neutral college students were recruited based on their responses to a pretest.

<sup>5</sup> Relative to national averages, our sample is overly representative of whites (87.9%), the educated (77.8% above high school), and those with high incomes (42.4% reporting over \$50,000 a year), but more fairly represents Lexington, Kentucky where most of the interviews were conducted.

reconciliation. In the *Bias Against Pro-Choice* version of the story, the pro-choice group was portrayed as being more disruptive than the pro-life group, while a similar logic underlies the *Bias Against Pro-Life* version of the news story.

It should be emphasized that the slant in the two "biased" versions of the news story was subtle and slight, rather than heavy-handed, to enhance the verisimilitude of the news articles. The days of the partisan press in the U.S. are over; market forces now constrain blatant forms of bias in mainstream news reporting. At the same time, more *subtle* biases are not uncommon (Paletz 1999). Thus, while much of the descriptive content of the two slanted articles was similar, the imbalance in the portrayal of the two groups was achieved through the order of presentation, the use of evaluative terms (e.g., describing pro-choice groups as "pro-abortion"), the wording of headlines, and other common methods of subtly slanting news stories discussed by Paletz (1999).<sup>6</sup>

By manipulating the content of the news stories in this way, our study is capable of shedding new light on whether and how ordinary people judge the degree of bias in different types of everyday news stories. To examine the interaction between respondent characteristics and the content of the news article, the following equation was estimated using ordered probit procedures<sup>7</sup>:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Perceived Bias} = & \text{News Treatment} + \text{Abortion Views} + \text{Treatment X Abortion Views} + \text{Ideology} \\ & + \text{Party Identification} + \text{Media Attention} + \text{Talk Radio Attention} + \text{Political} \\ & \text{Knowledge} + \text{General Trust} + \text{Demographic Variables} \end{aligned}$$

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<sup>6</sup> For partisan views of media bias in news coverage of the abortion issue, see the web-site materials of the liberal Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (<http://www.fair.org/extra/best-of-extra/abortion-coverage.html>) and the conservative Media Research Center (<http://www.mediaresearch.org/>).

<sup>7</sup> Because the dependent variable is ordinal, ordered probit estimation procedures in STATA 6.0 were deemed appropriate.

where the variables of primary interest are measured as follows (see the Appendix for the survey items used to measure all of the variables in the analysis):

- *Perceived Bias* was assessed by asking respondents, “How would you rate the bias in the article, if any?” The 7-point scale ranged from 1 (Very Biased in Favor of Pro-Life) to 4 (Even-handed) to 7 (Very Biased in Favor of Pro-Choice). To ease the interpretation of the probit results, the measure was collapsed to a 3-point scale: -1 (Biased in Favor of Pro-Life) to 0 (Even-handed) to 1 (Biased in Favor of Pro-Choice).
- *News Treatment* is simply the news article that respondents read, represented by three dummy variables, each scored 1 if the respondent read the news articles and 0 otherwise, with the Positive Balance news story being the omitted condition.
- *Abortion Views* was measured using the standard NES scale that ranges from 1 ("By law, abortion should never be permitted.") to 4 ("By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice."). To aid in the interpretation of the "main effects" of Abortion Views, scores were "centered" by subtracting the mean of the scale, which was 2.82 on the 4-point scale.
- The three *Treatment X Abortion Views* interactions were formed by multiplying each of the three News Treatment dummies times the Abortion Views variable.
- *Political Ideology* and *Party ID* ranged from 1 (strong conservative/Republican) to 7 (strong liberal/Democrat).
- *General Trust* is an additive scale assessing general skepticism about people, the government, and business. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ).
- *Political Knowledge* is an additive index indicating the number of correct answers to the following questions: Do you know the political office held by Trent Lott? Which branch of government declares laws unconstitutional? Which network employs Tom Brokaw? How much of a majority is required in Congress to override a presidential veto? Which party controls the House of Representatives? What job does Alan Greenspan hold (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ ).
- *Media Attention* was formed by summing responses to questions about the number of days per week the respondent watched or listened to the newspaper, national TV news, and local TV news (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ).
- *Talk Radio Attention* was assessed by asking respondents how frequently they listened to “political talk radio.”



- *Demographic* variables were included as controls. These include Gender (1 = male), Age (in increasing years), Race (1 = white; 0 = non-white), Education (an ordinal seven-point scale), and Income (an ordinal seven-point scale).

## Results

The left-hand column of coefficients in Table 1 (labeled “Model 1”) displays the ordered probit estimates for the above model. The chief finding we wish to emphasize from the estimates of Model 1 is the *lack* of evidence for the hostile media effect for the Balanced Positive news story, as indicated by the small and statistically insignificant coefficient associated with the Abortion Views variable. In fact, further analysis shows that the same insignificant result obtains for the Balanced Negative news story, as well. Regardless of whether both (pro-choice and pro-life) groups in the news article are portrayed in an equally positive or an equally negative light, prior abortion views are not significant predictors of perceptions of bias. Thus, the suggestion (made by Vallone, et al [1985] and Dalton et al [1998]) that *balanced* news portrayals are capable of engendering a hostile media reaction seems tenuous, at best.

### TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

A closer look at the perceptions of bias for the two balanced articles indicates that most respondents (78.2% for the Positive Balance article and 68% for the Negative Balance article) rated the two balanced articles as “even-handed,” not biased. Even among “partisans” on the abortion issue (i.e., respondents who fell at the extremes of the abortion views scale), there is no systematic tendency to rate the news article as biased. The simple correlations between Abortion Views and Perceived Bias for those at the polar extremes on the Abortion scale (at points 1 and 4) is not significant for either of the balanced versions of the news story ( $r = -.02$  for Positive Balance,  $-.04$  for Negative Balance). Clearly, even ordinary citizens who are partisans in the abortion debate do not “see bias” in objectively balanced articles in which the opposing side is

portrayed positively (Positive Balance) or their own side is portrayed negatively (Negative Balance).

Of course, one could always argue that the balanced articles our respondents read were not sufficiently engaging or inflammatory to provoke a hostile media reaction. Or it may be that if activists in the abortion debate had read the balanced news stories instead of our sample of ordinary people, the results would have been more in keeping with the hostile media hypothesis. But that is just our point: seemingly commonplace, balanced news articles read by ordinary people do not seem to be fertile grounds for the hostile media phenomenon.<sup>8</sup>

But what of the subtly biased news articles? Are they more hospitable to the hostile media effect? To focus our analysis more closely on perceptions of the biased news articles, we reestimated the above equation, this time including only the two news treatment dummies (and the corresponding interaction terms) for the two biased news article conditions, with the combined Balanced treatments becoming the omitted condition.<sup>9</sup> The ordered probit results for the revised model (Model 2) are presented in the right-hand column of entries in Table 1.

Given the coding of the two News Treatment dummies, the significant coefficients in the first two rows of entries for Model 2 indicate that respondents correctly perceived greater bias in the slanted news articles than the balanced articles. More importantly, the significant effects of the two interactive terms (Treatment X Abortion View) in the next two rows of entries provide the first evidence of a hostile media effect. Prior views on abortion exert much more influence on perceptions of bias when the article is subtly slanted against one's own side of the abortion

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<sup>8</sup> It is instructive to recall that prior studies investigating the hostile media effect in a naturalistic setting found that most respondents view the news as impartial and unbiased. Of course, there may be other types of balanced news stories that produce a hostile media reaction. Broadcast news, for example, may have a unique capability to evoke emotional reactions that encourage perceptions of news bias. We look forward to future studies that vary the content as well as the medium of news stories, a point to which we return in the concluding section of the paper.

<sup>9</sup> Having found the two balanced articles to be indistinguishable in terms of perceived bias, the data for these two treatments were pooled.

issue.<sup>10</sup> Thus, although strictly balanced articles discourage perceptions of a hostile media, even a small degree of slant in the portrayal of pro-life and pro-choice groups is fully capable of prompting perceptions of a biased and hostile press. We note that only prior abortion views are significant predictors of perceived bias, suggesting that only those predispositions most relevant to the issue at hand significantly shape judgments of bias.<sup>11</sup>

### TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

While the results in Table 1 shows that the impact of prior abortion views varies significantly across the versions of the news story, it tells us little about the magnitude and nature of these effects. Using the Clarify program developed by King, Tomz, and Wittenburg (1998), it is possible to compute predicted probabilities from an ordered probit regression. Table 2.A reports the changes in predicted probability of perceiving bias for movements across the Abortion View scale for respondents who read the article *biased against the pro-choice group*. Two general findings are apparent from this table. First, as predispositions change from pro-choice to pro-life, we see a significant change in direction of perceived bias in the article. Moving from a strong pro-choice predisposition to a strong pro-life predisposition, the probability of perceiving the article to be biased in favor of the pro-choice side increases by 26% and the probability of perceiving the article to be biased against the pro-life group decreases by 21%. Consistent with the hostile media hypothesis, those who hold strong pro-life predispositions are significantly more likely to perceive bias against their group, even when the true bias in the article favors their group. The second noteworthy finding in Table 2.A is the increase in the likelihood of perceiving bias as one's predispositions become more extreme. For

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<sup>10</sup> The coefficient for the Abortion View is not significant in the table because it gives the conditional impact of abortion attitudes for the omitted news treatment condition, that is, the Balanced news articles, a result already covered in our discussion of Table 1.

example, as one moves from holding moderately pro-life views to more extreme pro-life views, the probability of perceiving (incorrectly) that the article favors the pro-choice side increases by 10%.

Table 2.B reports the changes in predicted probabilities of perceiving bias for those who read the article *favoring the pro-choice group*. The findings are consistent with those reported in Table 2. People with more extreme pro-choice views are significantly more likely to (incorrectly) perceive the article as favoring the pro-life view. Also consistent with Table 2.A, more extreme views on abortion are associated with an increased likelihood of incorrectly perceiving bias. Once again, the examination of changes in predicted probabilities across the Abortion View scale provides solid support for the presence of the hostile media effect in these biased articles.

In a final effort to show in summary fashion how abortion views affect perceptions of bias differently for the two slanted articles, we display in Figure 1 the mean level of perceived bias across the abortion attitudes scale. Clearly, partisans tend to see objectively *biased* articles as “even-handed” *if the bias impugns the opposition group*. For those who read the article biased against the pro-life side (depicted in the graph by the solid line with squares), people with more extreme pro-choice views perceived the article as fair (mean 3.96).<sup>12</sup> By the same token, people with more extreme pro-life views tended to perceive the article as being biased in favor of the pro-choice side. A similar pattern exists for respondents who read the article biased against the pro-choice side: those who held strong pro-life views evaluated the article as mostly fair (mean =

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<sup>11</sup> We experimented with a number of different specifications for the other predictor variables, including interacting them with the news treatment variables as well as a three-way interaction between abortion views, news treatment and, say, political knowledge. None of these specifications yielded significant results for the other variables.

<sup>12</sup> The perception of bias score was expanded back to its original seven-point scale here, rather than the trichotomous version used earlier. Higher values indicate a greater perception of bias in favor of the pro-choice side, while lower numbers indicate a perception of bias in favor of the pro-life side. A value of 4 indicates that the individual saw the article as fair, or balanced.

4.17), whereas more extreme pro-choice views lead people to evaluate the article as increasingly unfair to their (pro-choice) side. Thus, people with more extreme views on abortion sometimes evaluate biased news articles as being fair, but only when the opposing side is being gored!

### **FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE**

#### **Conclusions**

The work we have presented in this paper is (admittedly) preliminary. The data we use for this analysis have only very recently become available, so much remains to be discovered. Still, this paper represents several important improvements on previous work in this area and holds the promise of new developments to come.

First, in terms of the contributions made here, our work represents a new attempt to study receiver-based explanations for the hostile media while simultaneously manipulating the level and direction of bias encoded in news messages. Prior experimental research showed partisan college students a single news broadcast that was atypically long and provocative. In contrast, by using newspaper articles that are similar to those that ordinary people might read in everyday life, our results help to extend the generalizability of prior experimental research on media bias.

More importantly, by manipulating the degree of bias in news articles that respondents read, our results shed new light on the question of how different types of coverage interact with receiver characteristics to produce perceptions of media bias. Thus, we were able to show that perceptions of a hostile and biased media are unlikely to occur in response to balanced news stories where two opposing

groups are portrayed in an equally positive or negative light. Thus, one likely consequence of journalistic attempts to provide people with balanced news coverage is that they recognize this attempt at "objectivity." Even partisans are unlikely to "see bias" in an objectively balanced news story. On the other hand, our results also suggest that even a small degree of objective slant in news coverage fuels the hostile media phenomenon, especially among partisans.

Our results also differ from survey studies in political science (e.g., Beck 1991; Dalton et al 1998) that have explored the hostile media hypothesis. One of the obvious strengths of such studies is their impressive external validity -- not only in terms of sampling of respondents and news stories but also in terms of the natural setting in which respondents are asked about existing news coverage of a particular election. A shortcoming of such studies, however, is that there is no way of knowing whether respondents have actually read (a sampling of) the news stories that are content analyzed. By providing a different "mix" of internal and external validity, our findings complement those of previous research on perceptions of media bias.

Several caveats about our findings are in order. First, asking respondents to read a news article in the context of a survey is, of course, not the same as reading the same article or a series of articles in a more natural setting. In addition, we have in no way exhausted all the possible forms of balance or bias that news stories may take. Moreover, we are in the process of administering our survey to liberal and conservative activists to determine whether a more engaged and partisan sample alters our findings. Finally, there are a wealth of future

research avenues to be explored. Are broadcast news stories inherently more evocative and thus more likely to be pegged as biased than newspaper articles, or do visual images distract viewers from making appraisals of bias? And do our findings apply to other issues and partisans aside from abortion? Also, further work needs to be carried out as to the specific processes by which people generate perceptions of bias and if there are different conditions where certain considerations are more important than others.

In conclusion, the work we present here represents a new step in understanding how people evaluate the information they receive from the news – a question vitally important to whether the media can effectively inform citizens.

## Appendix

### I. News Treatments

#### A. Positive Balanced Article

##### A Dialogue in New Mexico

##### **Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Groups Reach Out at Forum**

SANTA FE, Nm., Oct. 22— Billed as a historic event by its organizers, hundreds of delegates from national pro-life and pro-choice organizations met in a weekend retreat to “build a bridge of mutual respect” between the two groups. While angry exchanges took place early in the meetings, organizers are still calling it a significant coming together of traditional foes to “promote dialogue and discussion.”

In a high school gym, longtime abortion opponent Rev. Joseph Niece today said he wanted to “contribute to an end of the hate and violence between the two groups. We’re not here to argue, we’re here to reach some kind of understanding. My ultimate goal, I’ll make no bones about it, is to stop abortion, which is taking the lives of thousands of unborn children every year. But to be able to talk to your opponents, you have to turn down the rhetoric some.” Other pro-life members were not as cordial. Some held such signs as “Stop the Genocide,” but the general tone was one of cooperation.

A conciliatory tone was also struck by Rachael Hall, a member of the pro-choice delegation. “I hope the world will see that we are open-minded, even though we don’t agree with the stand the other side takes. We need to preserve a woman’s right to choose, but we also need to stop the violence and hateful speech between the two groups.” Some pro-choice members were heard shouting, “Stop the Bombing,” in reference to the bombing of abortion clinics by anti-abortion activists, but most of the shouting died as the meeting got underway.

By the end of the day, some bad feelings remained among some participants who refused to eat at the same banquet table together. But the organizers of the meeting remained hopeful that a dialogue of healing had begun.

#### B. Negative Balanced Article

##### Morality Wars Continue

##### **Verbal Scuffle Breaks Out Between Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Groups**

Santa Fe, NM, Oct. 22—A verbal scuffle broke out between pro-life and pro-choice protesters yesterday. Delegates from national pro-life and pro-choice organizations met here over the weekend to “build a bridge of mutual respect.” Instead of “promoting dialogue and discussion,” as organizers had hoped, the first day of the meeting quickly turned into an angry confrontation between activists from both groups who began noisy protests. Members of both groups began noisy protests, aimed at disrupting the conference shortly after it began.

Rev. Joseph Niece, a pro-life activist, leapt onstage to condemn the “anti-life” position as premeditated murder. “Abortion is the premeditated killing of babies! There can be no discussion with these murderers!” shouted Rev. Niece to some 200 pro-life supporters. Though organizers tried to restore order, a demonstration by pro-life supporters in the audience took up the loud chant, “Stop abortion now!” drowning out the public address system.

At the same time, members of the pro-choice delegation began their own noisy demonstration. Taking control of the microphone, Rachael Hall, a leader of the pro-choice delegation screamed, “The murderers here are [pro-life] hypocrites who bomb clinics and kill doctors! We can start talking when you stop bombing!” Among the 200 or so pro-choice supporters in the audience, many shouted “It’s our right, keep up the fight!” Some held ready-made signs such as “Stop the Bombing,” in reference to the bombing of abortion clinics by anti-abortion activists.

After nearly an hour of demonstrations, meeting organizers were able to quiet the assembly. While moderators were able to begin a dialogue later in the day, bad feelings remained as some participants refused to eat at the same banquet table that evening. At the end of the first day of a meeting designed to promote peace between feuding groups, the gulf between them seemed as wide as ever.



## Appendix I (continued)

### C. Bias Against Pro-Choice Article

#### Morality Wars Continue

#### Verbal Scuffle Breaks Out Between Pro-Life and Pro-Abortion Groups

Santa Fe, NM, Oct. 22—A verbal scuffle broke out between pro-life and pro-abortion supporters yesterday. Delegates from national organizations representing the two groups met here over the weekend to “build a bridge of mutual respect” between traditional foes. Instead of “promoting dialogue and discussion,” as organizers had hoped, the first day of the meeting quickly turned into an angry confrontation as pro-abortion protesters disrupted the conference.

Within minutes after convening the conference, Rachael Hall, a leader of the pro-abortion delegation, leapt onstage to scream into the microphone, “We can start talking when you pro-life hypocrites stop bombing clinics and killing doctors!” Though organizers tried to restore order, a demonstration by pro-abortion supporters in the audience took up the loud chant, “It’s our right, keep up the fight!” drowning out the public address system.

While some pro-life activists were involved in the shouting, a different tone was struck by longtime pro-life activist Rev. Joseph Niece, who said he wanted to “contribute to an end of the hate and violence between the two groups. We’re not here to argue, we’re here to reach some kind of understanding. My ultimate goal, I’ll make no bones about it, is to stop abortion, which is taking the lives of thousands of unborn children every year. But to be able to talk to your opponents, you have to turn down the rhetoric some.”

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### D. Bias Against Pro-Life Article

#### Morality Wars Continue

#### Verbal Scuffle Breaks Out Between Anti-Abortion and Pro-Choice Groups

Santa Fe, NM, Oct. 22—A verbal scuffle broke out between anti-abortion and pro-choice supporters yesterday. Delegates from national organizations representing the two groups met here over the weekend to “build a bridge of mutual respect” between traditional foes. Instead of “promoting dialogue and discussion,” as organizers had hoped, the first day of the meeting quickly turned into an angry confrontation as anti-abortion protesters disrupted the meeting.

Within minutes after the conference got underway, a prominent anti-abortion activist, Rev. Joseph Niece, leapt onstage to condemn the “pro-choice” position. “Abortion is the premeditated killing of babies! There can be no discussion with these murderers!” shouted Rev. Niece to some 100 pro-life supporters. Though organizers tried to restore order, a demonstration by anti-abortion supporters in the audience took up the loud chant, “Stop abortion now!” drowning out the public address system.

While some pro-choice activists were involved in the shouting, a different tone was struck by Rachael Hall, a leader of the pro-choice delegation. “I hope the world will see that we are open-minded, even though we don’t agree with the stand the other side takes. We need to preserve a woman’s right to choose, but we also need to stop the violence and hateful speech between the two groups.”

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## II. Survey Items

- A. *Abortion Views*: “Which one of the opinions on abortion below best agrees with your view ?”  
 1= By law abortion should never be permitted; 2= The law should permit abortion ONLY in the case of rape, incest, or when the mother’s life is in danger; 3= The law should permit abortion for reasons OTHER THAN rape, incepts, or the woman’s life, if the need for an abortion ahs been clearly established; 4= By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice. The measure was centered by subtracting the mean of the scale.
- B. *Talk Radio Listening*: “Some people listen to political talk radio programs in which people call in to voice their opinions about politics. How often do you listen to those programs?” (1= Never; 2= Only Occasionally; 3= Once or Twice a Week; 4= Most Days; 5= Every Day)
- C. *General Trust*
1. I have a lot of trust in the people running the government in Washington.
  2. “You can’t trust most people these days.” (Coded 1-7 where 1=Strongly Disagree; 7= Strongly Agree)
  3. How much of the time do you think you can trust...”Politicians to tell the truth to the public?
  4. Major corporations to tell the truth about their products to consumers? (Coded 1-7 where 1=Almost Always; 7= Almost Never)
- D. *Media Attention*: How often do you...
1. Read the news in a daily newspaper?
  2. Watch the national news on TV?
  3. Watch the LOCAL news, for example, ‘Eyewitness News’ or ‘Action News’?
  4. Listen to news on the radio? (1= Never; 2= Only Occasionally; 3= Once or Twice a Week; 4= Most Days; 5= Every Day)

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TABLE 1

**Predicting Perceptions of Bias in newspaper Articles From News Content and Perceiver Characteristics**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
<i>News Treatment</i>		
Balance Negative Article	-.04 (.14)	-----
Bias against Pro-Choice Article	-.51 (.14)**	-.55 (.12)**
Bias against Pro-Life Article	.30 (.14)*	.31 (.13)**
<i>Abortion Views</i>	.04 (.11)	-.01 (.07)
<i>News X Abortion Views</i>		
Abortion X Bal. Neg. Article	-.06 (.13)	-----
Abortion X Pro-Choice Article	-.27 (.14)*	-.28 (.12)**
Abortion X Pro-Life Article	-.33 (.14)*	-.26 (.13)**
<i>Political Predispositions</i>		
Party Identification	-.02 (.04)	-.03 (.04)
Ideology	-.01 (.05)	-.02 (.05)
Political Knowledge	.01 (.03)	-.01 (.03)
General Skeptical Disposition	-.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)
<i>Media Attentiveness</i>		
Media Attention	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Talk Radio Listening Freq.	-.01 (.06)	-.01 (.07)
<i>Demographic Characteristics</i>		
Education	-.09 (.05)	-.08 (.05)
Gender	-.04 (.10)	-.07 (.11)
Race	-.06 (.16)	-.03 (.17)
Income	-.06 (.16)	.04 (.04)
Age	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
<i>(N)</i>	511	511
<i>Chi-Square (DF)</i>	55.01** (18)	52.01* *(16)

Source: 1999 Kentucky News Survey

<sup>a</sup> Entries are ordered probit coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed test

**Table 2**  
**Changes in Predicted Probabilities for Perceiving Bias**  
**for Various Movements along the Abortion View Scale**

**A. News Article Biased Against Pro-Choice**

<b>Change in Probability Given a Change From...</b>	<b>Perception of Bias is...*</b>		
	<b>Favoring Pro- Choice</b>	<b>Even-Handed</b>	<b>Favoring Pro-Life</b>
Strong Pro-Choice To Strong Pro-Life	.26 (.11)	-.05 (.04)	-.21 (.08)
Mild Pro-Life to Strong Pro-Life	.10 (.05)	-.06 (.04)	-.05 (.01)
Mild Pro-Choice to Strong Pro-Choice	-.07 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	.09 (.04)

**B. News Article Biased Against Pro-Life**

<b>Change in Probability Given a Change From...</b>	<b>Perception of Bias is...*</b>		
	<b>Favoring Pro- Choice</b>	<b>Even-Handed</b>	<b>Favoring Pro-Life</b>
Strong Pro-Life to Strong Pro-Choice	-.24 (.12)	.04 (.04)	.19 (.09)
Mild Pro-Life to Strong Pro-Life	.10 (.05)	-.05 (.04)	-.05 (.02)
Mild Pro-Choice to Strong Pro-Choice	-.06 (.03)	-.02 (.02)	.08 (.04)

\*Responses to the Question "How would you rate the bias of the article, if any?"

**Figure 1 - Perceptions of Bias  
In News Articles**

